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EXECUTIVE

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AFFORDABLE
ACTION: **OVERCOME**
OPPOSITION

By Gloria Elisa Chavez

Just say GO

DEVELOPERS DEVISE A FORMULA FOR FIGHTING THE NIMBY RESPONSE

Fighting “not in my backyard” attitudes is a daunting task. No matter what developers call a project—neighborhood revitalization, workforce housing, smart growth, urban village—a public with a mindset against affordable housing is a formidable power. A public education or community relations campaign is often a developer’s best recourse when NIMBY interests begin to organize.

There is no magic cure for changing public perception. Everyone has a theory or case study on the best approach. On closer inspection, however, there is a common thread that runs through most campaigns: substantial commitment by all parties involved and perseverance through inevitably difficult times. These projects can be built. Consider the example of Hermosa Village in Anaheim, Calif. This affordable housing project, which included acquisition and rehabilitation of existing apartments, faced a determined set

of NIMBY opponents. But these protesters were won over, thanks to a formula (see “Secrets to Success,” right) that has garnered results for many developers in similar situations. This approach worked so well that these same protesters are now advocating for expansion of the project they initially opposed.

Troubled Neighborhood

For more than a decade, Anaheim, home of Disneyland, battled the persistent decline of a neighborhood ironically located behind “The Happiest Place on Earth.” This area, known as Jeffrey-Lynne for two streets that intersect in its core, consisted of more than 100 apartment buildings containing a total of 729 primarily one-bedroom units arranged in eight-plex buildings. The structures, built in the 1960s, were all in various states of disrepair, having suffered the effects of absentee ownership.

The buildings weren’t the only things in trouble. In 1997,

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—KIM MCKAY, THE RELATED COMPANIES OF CALIFORNIA

before the property was acquired and new construction began, police received 2,071 calls for assistance—an average of six per day.

The city chose two developers to recreate the neighborhood: the Related Companies of California, an Irvine-based development firm, and Southern California Housing Development Corporation, a nonprofit developer from Rancho Cucamonga, Calif. Because of the size of the Hermosa Village project and the limited funding available, the partners chose a phased approach to redevelopment.

The development team decided to tackle the "core" area first because it had the worst crime, overcrowding, disrepair, and mismanagement. This area consisted of 54 buildings with approximately 432 one-bedroom multifamily units. "We decided to address the root of the problem first with a plan to acquire the outlying areas later as more resources became available," said Ashley Wright, director of project development for SoCal Housing. "It's like hitting the bull's-eye and then working out from there." The Hermosa Village rehabilitation included reconfiguring and reconstructing 343 of those one-bedroom units into more varied housing, an effort to accommodate the larger families living there. The developers reduced that to 67 one-bedroom apartments, converting the rest into 138 two-bedroom, 78 three-bedroom, and 10 four-bedroom units for a total of 293 affordable apartments and 16 market-rate one-bedroom units.

They also brought amenities to the overall development, adding features such as a swimming pool, tot-lots, community center (with a computer lab, child care area and after-school program), laundry centers, and walking paths.

A neighborhood in such blighted condition would seemingly welcome the resources and rehabilitation plan that the city and developers were proposing. Even the best-intentioned proposal can encounter disfavor, however, and that's

what happened to Hermosa Village. The predominantly Spanish-speaking, very low-income neighborhood was a tight-knit community that produced several grass-roots organizations. Most residents distrusted any proposed change, and through these community-based groups, they organized to protest the development. In addition, property owners, who were reluctant to sell, also banded together and hired lawyers to block the

development.

"This was an intense NIMBY situation because the strongest opposition wasn't from the surrounding neighbors but from the residents themselves," says Kim McKay, vice president of development for the Related Companies of California. "There was a fear of gentrification."

Activists quickly assembled formal protest groups to support the neighborhood efforts. Chartered buses transport-

Secrets to Success

Persuade Project Opponents by Following These Principles

Be committed. There must be an exceptionally strong commitment on the part of all the stakeholders for any public education campaign to be successful. These stakeholders are not limited to the developer's representatives or partners; they sometimes include public agencies or entities that want to see a project developed but are usually under intense pressure from NIMBY opponents. There will be opposition, and articulating and demonstrating the necessary commitment upfront significantly improves the likelihood of a successful campaign.

Hold community meetings. The dreaded community meeting should be the cornerstone of the tactical component of your campaign. The key to successful community meetings is to listen—a lot. Do not expect to persuade all your opponents in the first meeting. Expect to listen, listen, listen. Take in all comments, analyze the concerns and, very importantly, note the core opinion leaders. It will be vital to connect with these key people.

People want to be heard and, unfortunately, they often shout to ensure that happens. Be patient. Come back to subsequent meetings with ideas and plan revisions that reflect their concerns. The intensity of community meetings will almost always tone down, and these gatherings will become increasingly productive.

Form an advisory board. Through community meetings and other interactions, identify key

community leaders and opinion leaders, and invite them to join the project's advisory board. Ideal candidates include people who are respected in the community and are open to a true collaborative effort in the best interest of the neighborhood. Resist the temptation to create figurehead boards with no real influence. These will be ineffectual in swaying the larger community.

Give tours of past projects. Although it sounds cliché, "seeing is believing." Showing your work or your goals can be one of the single most powerful tools in a public education campaign. Invite community, business, and political leaders and other constituents to tour similar developments. Seeing the quality of a developer's work firsthand often leaves a positive impression on even the most adamant opponent.

Meet with the media. Be proactive about establishing relationships with local journalists on the business, housing, or community beats. The opposition won't hesitate to contact the media. Make sure you tell your story, not allow others to tell it for you.

Prepare to persevere. Changing public perception is an incredible task. It will invariably take a significant investment of time, and it will be easy to get discouraged along the way. But it can be done.

ed scores of residents to city hall to rally during public meetings. Rumors swept through the neighborhood that Hermosa Village was a guise for an expansion of Disney-related hotels, restaurants, and resorts. The local media published stories about the development, running story after story with sensational headlines such as "Ethnic Cleansing: Anaheim redevelops away the poor" and "Communication Breakdown: Jeffrey-Lynne residents fear what Anaheim has in store for them."

Making Friends

But the developers took a proactive approach to the opposition, forming a resident advisory committee. This group included leaders from the same organizations that were heading the protest. Other members included representatives from



Concerned residents became community advocates and helped shape the look and feel of Hermosa Village in Anaheim, Calif.

The first meetings tested the limits of the development team's and the city's perseverance. "People were suspicious of everything we presented. There was no dialogue because everything we said was received with distrust," says Jim Aliberti, senior director of property management for Southern California Housing

arrangements made with the school district for displaced schoolchildren to be bussed to their regular school."

In the end, the Jeffrey-Lynne neighborhood was renamed Hermosa Village, a name selected by the resident advisory committee. Now, the development team is working on the second phase, which will include another 112 affordable one-, two-, and three-bedroom units. The residents' group remains active, but with a new focus: expanding the development it initially opposed. It wants the city to expand the development and include all the buildings on the 32-acre site in the redevelopment plan.

"Originally there was a lot of fear. People believed they were going to get kicked out of their homes," recalls Francisco Ceja, president of the resident advisory committee. "We worked hard to

"THE COMMITTEE WAS THE KEY TO ARRIVING TO A POINT OF REAL DIALOGUE."—JIM ALIBERTI, SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORP.

the community, fair housing, city, and development team. The committee, still active today, met every week during the entire development process. Local journalists attended. The resident advisory committee provided input on the construction, site amenities, and phasing plans and was instrumental in the formation of the relocation plan. In fact, the committee approved the relocation plan before it was presented to the city council.

By opening the meetings to the public and inviting the media there was no choice but for both sides to be heard. The residents' group also gave vital input to the developers, including communication of resident concerns, rumors, and information about criminal activity.

"It evolved into a great tool. The RAC took ownership of the project, and once that happened, they became the sounding board for resident issues and complaints. The distrust evaporated and real concerns and problems could be raised and resolved," McKay says. "I would highly recommend it."

Of course, getting to that happy place of cooperative coexistence was not easy.

Development Corp., who remembers the difficulties the project encountered in the early phases. But things changed with the establishment of the residents' group. "The resident advisory committee consisted of members who were respected in the community. People listened to them," Aliberti says. "The committee was the key to arriving to a point of real dialogue."

For developers, the temptation to form advisory boards that exert no real influence or authority is strong. It is difficult to surrender authority when you are the entity bearing most of the risk and with the most technical expertise. However, people in the community are the experts with regard to the needs of their neighborhood—and ultimately, they are your customers.

"The resident advisory committee addressed real concerns of the people," Aliberti says. "This was a complicated situation. We had more than 3,000 people to relocate in a very tight rental market. The committee brought back concerns about such issues as school bussing that resulted in creative solutions such as

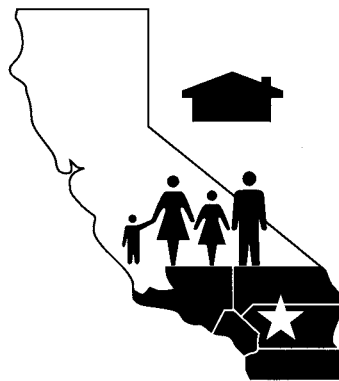
come to resolution. The city and the developers did what they said they would do, and we realized this was a positive thing for our community." ■

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Gloria Elisa Chavez is director of corporate communications for the Southern California Housing Development Corporation. In "Just Say Go," she advises developers to turn their enemies into allies by

convincing neighborhood groups that their new project is, in fact, a good thing. "There is no magic cure for changing public perception," she writes. "On closer inspection, however, there is a common thread that runs through most campaigns: substantial commitment by all parties involved and perseverance through inevitably difficult times."



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another step forward

RIVERSIDE COUNTY



As the fastest growing county in California, one thing is certain about Riverside in the future: change is inevitable. And “change” is the focus of the DVD titled “Another Step Forward.” This DVD illuminates the housing challenges that decision-makers will be faced with as western Riverside County changes over time. Foremost among the theme of “change” is that our subregion must manage future growth in a way that can preserve our way of life, our community, our land, and our open space. Regarding our need to house the next 800,000 people who will call western Riverside County “home” in the next twenty years, the DVD presents what will be among our most pressing challenges in the future: providing enough housing, increasing our housing choices, and placing housing in the right locations. In the end, we must be cognizant that one key to a successful future for the WRCOG subregion is for leaders to recognize that increasing the amount of housing and the variety of housing choices – ranging from rural estates to high density urban settings – will be a critical component to improving our economy, environment, and ultimately, our quality of life.

(The narrative for the DVD is provided on the back page)

Another Step Forward...

"Welcome to Riverside County, formed in 1893 by carving out a portion of San Bernardino and a larger part of San Diego County. The County's early years were linked proudly to the agricultural industry, with the areas we know of today covered by vast farmland. Over time these agricultural areas gave way to commerce, construction, manufacturing, transportation, and tourism, contributing substantially to the region's rapid growth.

Recent years have brought dramatic population growth to our area. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of residents grew by nearly 80%, making Riverside the fastest growing county in California. Today our County is home to over 1.4 million residents. Over the next twenty years, western Riverside County alone will need some 350,000 new homes, and some 375,000 new jobs for 800,000 new residents.

How will we manage this growth while preserving our way of life, our community, our land, and our open space? The choice is in our hands. If we continue to follow and develop at our current pattern of density of approximately 2.5 dwelling units per acre, 145,000 acres would be sacrificed by the year 2025 alone. The choice to develop our land at 4 dwelling units per acre would allow us to cut our consumption of land by almost one-third. The choice to develop at 6 units per acre would cut our consumption of land by nearly two-thirds. The concentration of housing at the right locations could perhaps save thousands of acres for parks, open space, and farmland.

We are faced with these challenges that will define our future: providing enough housing; increasing our housing choices; and placing housing in the right locations. These challenges will test our ability as a community to preserve our history, strengthen our identity, and foster vibrant communities. We want parks and recreational amenities, quality community design, walkability to our schools and jobs, shopping and retail convenience, and a safe and healthy environment, among other things. To not make a change or a choice about our future is making a choice.

Things never remain the same, regardless of how much we want them to. We would love it if our children could remain young and carefree forever, if we could stop time during those comfortable moments of our lives. But whether we are ready for it or not, times change. Things grow and life always has a new adventure just around the corner. Regardless of what direction we choose to take in building for the future, Riverside County will continue to grow. With thoughtful application, we can mold and guide that growth towards a vision that will help preserve our way of life – for our children, and for their children."

"Change has a considerable psychological impact on the human mind. To the fearful it is threatening because it means that things may get worse. To the hopeful it is encouraging because things may get better. To the confident it is inspiring because the challenge exists to make things better."

- King Whitney Jr.

For additional copies of this DVD please contact:

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fina productions



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Narration by Sean Warner.
Music by Eric Mellgren.

